2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa
Selya, Mu Ngonde

people say: '*Tukali ukunkesya unsyuka* (We have not yet bidden farewell to the shade),' *ukukesya* being the word used for bidding a courteous farewell to departing guests. Mwaisumo elaborated the point. He said: 'The death ritual is a saying good-bye, it is to see off the dead man accompanying him on his way (*ukunsindikela*); to demonstrate that we have buried him indeed, and to pray that forgetfulness may now come on us.' Another informant explained: 'Touching the earth is to say "Good-bye, friend." '

The danger of madness was given as the reason both for the whole ritual and for many separate actions in it. 'You go mad if you do not shave after a death,' said the wife of the chief Mwaihojo. 'You go mad if you keep the hair of the corpse (*inwili sya mfimba*),' said Mwandisi, the old blind historian, and he went on: 'Yes, much madness comes from the shades if you have neglected the death ritual for a wife or for parents, and the ritual at puberty also. Madness comes from the shades and from Kyala. And if a woman refuses to perform the ritual for her husband who has died, and refuses to lie down with the heir, she also goes mad.' If someone does go mad the cause is usually said to be neglect of the death ritual or some mistake in its performance.

Other types of illness are also attributed to neglect of the death ritual. Kasitile was ailing and thought that his illness was due partly to the fact that he had not completed the death ritual for a relative. Mwilabe said of the sweeping in the ritual: 'They sweep round their legs lest their bodies become swollen and sick. It is said that their bodies will swell if they attend the ritual of someone else and this is done and they themselves have not been swept over.' Several informants mentioned 'a lingering and painful death' (a terror often spoken of by the Nyakyusa) as the penalty for neglecting a ritual, and the last part of the ritual is expressly interpreted as a prophylactic against the 'gasping cough'.

Finally, it is said that the crops will not flourish if the ritual is neglected. Kakuju, a village headman of Selya, was explicit on the point: 'If you do not bury your father properly the food will disappear. They (the diviners) will tell you to find something and when beer has been left overnight outside in the banana grove you pray to the shade.' The fear that the crops will not flourish is not mentioned so frequently as the danger of madness, but it is a general notion.

The danger of madness or other illness coming on one is thought to be greatest if a man tastes the ritual food or beer, or is sprinkled

2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa
Selya, Mu Ngonde

764 i. *Kasitile's interpretation.* (Recorded by G. W. in Nyakyusa and
765 translated by him shortly afterwards.)[1]

775 KASITILE: We go to bathe wearing leaves, we throw them away, we bathe, then we come back and shave our hair. This means we are driving away the shade (*unsyuka*), for at first he is in our bodies. Our fathers told us: 'When I die I shall not reach the place of the shades unless you do the ritual for me; those who preceded me will drive me back saying: "You are not one of us, you cannot come, they have not yet done your ritual." For the shades linger on the way at first, they do not reach their place.' We do the ritual so as to tell the shade: 'We have given you everything, now go away and may your fellow shades receive you, do not come here.'

764 When we return from bathing we put a banana in the ground with
765 a pumpkin-seed and a lentil in it. We stoop and bite a piece off, and
828 then we shave the hair. There is much idiocy (*ubulema*) if you do not perform the ritual, and madness (*ikigili*), or perhaps you will have a lingering death. The shade is in the body, he causes madness (*ikigili*), he says: 'Why have you not done the ritual?' The shades pound and stamp the body.

Mwambuputa (a village headman) joining in the conversation said:

775 All this round us [with a sweeping gesture] is the place of the shades.
764 What we have buried is only the body, to prevent it stinking, but the heart (*indumbula*) stays here.

KASITILE: The banana which we bite in the ground is like the
764 sausages of porridge of the Kukwe, it is excrement, it is filth; because
765 I think that if I do not perform the ritual I may run mad and eat filth.
828 Also before this they beat up a mash of cowpeas, they take it with a spoon and put it against the wall, and one by one we come and eat. This also is eating filth so that we may escape and be clean.

[177] Madness (*ikigili*)[2] is of two kinds, one comes from Kyala (but we used to say from Mbasi, we did not say Kyala) and one from ritual. Mwaipopo (the chief) had the madness (*ikigili*); it is in his family on his mother's side. This is the madness of Mbasi, they do their rituals all right. Mbasi is he who lived with my father here. He called 'Kanjuki! Kanjuki!' from the hillside; then my mother would cook him some food
764 and my father would put something out for him.[3] When we perform
765 the rituals the shades are very pleased to see it; of old you might hear
775 them clapping their hands in the evening here, after we had finished a ritual. But they have gone away now. . . . Yes, the shades are filthy

● 826

[1] I have made minor changes in the translation.
[2] Distinguished from a trance or epileptic fit, *ukukoma amalago*.
[3] See *Communal Rituals among the Nyakyusa* (in preparation).

6:Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1939 FN17 Ngonde FN17

789 643 834 cooked it instead. One of the reasons for killing most of his sons, as we have seen, was to lessen the danger of his wives committing adultery with them, for adultery was a magical cause of sickness. His wives themselves were jealously guarded.

643 784 821 Then again a Kyungu might not wade across the river lest the act of doing so should magically bring a deluge of rain from heaven, he had always to be carried.

789 643 764 826 And the breath and the growing parts of a Kyungu's body—his hair and nails and the constantly replaced mucus of his nose—were believed to be magically connected with the fertility of the Ngonde plain. When he was killed his nostrils were stopped so that he was buried "with breath in his body"; while portions of his hair and nails and of his nasal mucus were taken from him beforehand and buried later by the nobles of Ngonde in the black mud near the river. This action was believed to "close up the land, to keep it rich and heavy and fertile, as it was when he himself lived in it."

789 622 826 Now the Lwembe of Lubaga had equally magical flesh, but the other chiefs of Ngonde and the Nyakyusa had not. They could wade across rivers, fall ill and be wounded without endangering their subjects. But of all alike the breath and the hair and nails had a magical importance. Every ruling chief in both areas had his nostrils stopped by his great-commoners when nearing death, while portions of his hair and nails[1] were taken from him when living and buried after his death in a special place. The hair and nails were held to be magically connected through their growth with the growth of crops. "You see these nails of yours," said the man who explained the symbolism to us, "if you cut them do they not grow again?" (They do.) "And where does their growth come from? Does it not come from within the body?" (It does.) "Well then that is the reason, the great-commoners take power of growth from the chief in the form of his nails and hair."

789 782 Besides his magical body the Kyungu had a host of magical possessions. There was the iron stool *Kirumbi* on which he was set at his accession; once he had sat upon it he could not flee the position or he would die. There was the drum *Mwenekelwa* whose note was believed to be heard by the most distant of the Kyungu's subjects. When it was beaten "all the little nobles from afar off would hear and obey the summons; they would all come together. Then we would tell them that so and so had not brought any ivory for a long time! Then they would come with tusks as tribute, to pay worship to the Kyungu." But sometimes the drum would refuse to sound and they would kill a

[1] We were only told about the nasal mucus in the case of the Kyungu.

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

754 but I see them. It's taboo to speak. They must seek blood and they go
775 off; we fear them!
753 QUESTION: Why do you chiefs never speak out if you are throttled?
KAIFITILE: If I speak how many would there be to name? Very many!
[689] For us it's taboo to accuse a man of witchcraft, but the commoners
[554] accuse one another. Look you, do few people keep you company?
Many!

Like us chiefs, everyone comes. It's taboo for us to speak out, we fear. Look you, when Mwambene (Mwaipopo 116) and I were alone we feared to throw out the beer, we said: 'If we throw it out will they leave?' But when Kimogota came, he said: 'All right, I will throw it
[152] out myself.' We fear the fierce great priests, the terrible witches, they are angry.[1] We shrink when they appear.

[622] The village headmen of the country call on the priests for help against us, they whisper by the fire, the priests come in their witchcraft,
[793] they call on my shades saying, 'Let us punish him', also they eat, together with the shades. Our shades never initiate anything, never; they look to the priests. But with a commoner the shade may initiate matters himself. Yes, people whisper indeed, but is that witchcraft? No! They whisper openly and ask, 'Why did you not perform the ritual?' But even although people are silent, still the shade comes
[688] saying, 'Why did you not perform the ritual? I am on the road.' He initiates the thing himself.

QUESTION: But don't people eat meat at the ritual of a commoner?
KAIFITILE: Yes, and if he does not celebrate it they accuse him, but they accuse him openly.

QUESTION: If the heir buries him with a few cattle?
688 KAIFITILE: If a rich commoner dies and the heir buries him with only
775 one cow, the shades are angry and the people also; their chilling
774 breath comes on his body, perhaps he falls ill himself, perhaps his child falls ill, but the people and witches do not meet together, people are angry here, and the shades there; all of them and the shades too, because he has celebrated with one cow only. People are angry because
[787] they wish to eat the meat. But the oracle says, 'The shades are angry.' It does not speak of people, it knows that people also are angry, but it speaks of the shades. And at the celebration he prays in the evening, the next day he calls people and kills a cow, and throws the sacred
[783] meat in the banana grove, saying, 'Here is your meat, father.' People say, 'Indeed he did wrong, his father was angry', but they do not condemn saying, 'It was we', no, they say 'the shades' . . .

● [826] We chiefs have bodies which are different, the commoners arrived
[554] first in the country, they ate raw food, we fear them saying, 'They eat raw food.' It is we who followed and brought fire. To us they confirm

[1] Asinyago indoni mikalale. The noun class implies size, ferocity, and dislike.

9:Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

(their witchcraft); to each other they say: 'It is your father.' Because if they confess to a fellow commoner saying, 'It is we', he says, 'You are "eating" me, drink the ordeal'. The witch is driven out. But to us they admit saying, 'It was we who were angry.' They do not fear us. Commoners are the seniors in the country; they arrived first.

It will be remembered that the commoners are spoken of as 'black people' (abatito) and that the first chiefs were 'pale' (mwele) but these words also have moral implications. 'It is said that a person "has a black heart" or "has black blood", or "is black in his face towards us" when he is thought to be a witch, eating his fellows, or when he is a thief, or a liar, or an adulterer, or dirty. Even though his body is light coloured (mwele) the word "black" (mito) is used of him metaphorically.' And *mwele* implies innocent, pure, as well as light in colour. The comparable symbolism of 'nigger' and 'white man' is all too familiar in Johannesburg or Charleston.

That Kasitile himself was much afraid of the commoner chiefs and was relieved by the 'speaking out' was clear, and the people of the country as a whole were glad that the ritual had been celebrated, for they expected an increase in fertility. Some days later Mwakyonde (148), came in and said, laughing, but half serious: 'Congratulations, Mwaipaja (G.W.). You have celebrated the ritual, we rejoice greatly, you give us fertility of the soil, you are a great priest.'

In some moods Kasitile was inclined to become a Christian, but he felt an obligation to the country as priest, and believed too strongly in the efficacy of the traditional rituals to abandon them. He said to G.W. one day, over a pot of beer: 'If it were not for the ritual I would get you to speak to the Europeans of the mission, and I would go with my wife Jane, and be baptised. If my son was old enough and had agreed to carry on the ritual I would do it; perhaps I will when I am old. . . . It is good to have one's heart washed clean, we are *dirty* inside. The Christians say to us: "You with your four wives each, you are all dirty, you love one and squabble with the rest." Well, it is so with me, I love Jane only; I would like to go and be baptised with her. But I *fear* for the ritual, I fear hunger, the hunger of the people. For I am the food of the country, I am the maker of food.'

We left Selya shortly after this and were not able to observe the effect of the ritual on political relationships in Selya. Kasitile lived another seventeen years, duly performing his functions, and in 1954 he was succeeded by his brother's son, James.